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EPA officials announce clean-up completion

NL Taracorp site to be finished by end of month

By Scott Cousins
Staff writer

With the recently-capped NL Taracorp lead pile as a backdrop and a group of Head Start children sitting in front, officials with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Wednesday that the clean-up of residential areas in the NL Taracorp Superfund Site is nearly completed.

The final clean up of the site is expected by the end of the month, and monitoring equipment for the area will be installed by September.

Speaking on behalf of Mayor Ron Selph of Granite City and Tyrone Echols of Venice, who could not attend the event, Mayor John Hamm of Madison said the EPA and private contractors responsible for the clean up did "a great job."

"This affords the people of Madison, Granite City and Venice a healthy place to live," he said.

See EPA, Page A5



Tim Stephenson photo

Madison County Board Chairman Rudy Papa talks during a ceremony announcing the completion of the NL Taracorp Superfund site clean-up.

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EPA officials announce clean-up completion

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Timothy Fields Jr., assistant administrator of the EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, was the main speaker.

He pointed out that the 30th anniversary of Earth Day was celebrated a few weeks ago, and the Superfund program will be 20 years old in December.

"We celebrated rivers no longer catching on fire, the air being healthy enough to breathe, the land being cleaned up; we think much progress has been made over the last 30 years," he said. "This site and the progress here, represents that type of progress that we want to achieve all over the country."

Of the approximately 1,300 Superfund sites in the country, he said 685 are completed.

"We think of no place better to celebrate this than in Granite City," he said. "We think the progress here is symbolic of progress being made on Superfund sites throughout the country, where cleanups are being done faster, cheaper and more efficiently."

Fields also talked about the site being the first in the Superfund Job Training Initiative program.

Local residents were trained to qualify for jobs in environmental assessment and cleanup.

Of the 25 who participated, eight were hired at the NL Taracorp site, and others were hired at different sites or related

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The clean up of the 16-acre site and the nearby 14-acre main industrial property was completed in September 1999. The residential clean up included testing of about 2,500 homes and removal of lead-contaminated soil from about 1,500 yards in the Granite City, Madison, Venice and Eagle Park areas.

The owners of 87 properties would not allow the EPA to test.

Of those, about 10 were in a "hot zone" where lead contamination in adjoining homes was at least twice the allowable level.

That will be noted on the deeds of those homes, and that will make it difficult to sell the properties without testing.

The cost of testing is about \$200 per home, but if lead is found the cost of cleanup is between \$10,000 and \$20,000.

The cost of the project was \$63 million. Of that about \$30 million was recovered from NL Industries.

The main site was a secondary lead smelter and refining plant from 1903 to 1983. Lead

contamination from the site includes airborne smelter stack emissions in nearby areas, and battery chips used as fill throughout the area.

In 1986, the EPA included the site on its National Priorities List.

The study ended in 1988, and cleanup began in 1993.

About 50 people gathered in the 1600 block of Edison Avenue in Granite City for the program.

Brad Bradley, one of two regional project managers for the site, said the location was picked because it had been one of the most contaminated of the residential sites.

EPA will clean up lead-contaminated sites when the lead levels reach 500 parts per million. Bradley said in that neighborhood some of the levels reached 3,500 PPM. The most heavily contaminated areas were the alleys in Eagle Park and Venice where battery chips were used as fill. He said contamination in some of those areas reached 100,000 PPM.

Area to receive \$2 million grant for lead paint removal

Announcement part of NL Taracorp Superfund site completion

Dott Cousins
writer

part of the ceremonies marking the completion of the Taracorp Superfund site cleanup, officials announced the Tri-Cities area will receive \$2 million to deal with lead paint in homes within the Superfund area.

The funding comes as a part of the Environmental Project, and is paid by the Potentially Responsible Parties, the companies responsible for the Taracorp contamination.

The money is paid instead of a fine by the more than 100 companies responsible for contaminating the site, and is expected to be approved in federal court. The money would be used to clean and administer the cleanup of lead-based paint in homes in the Superfund site area. That is in addition to a \$3.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development received by Madison County Community Development last year to start the Lead Safe 2000 program. So far, Cheryl Jouett, MCCD administrator, said 65 homes have been identified for remediation under the program. Of those, 20 are in the Tri-Cities

"Lead paint was used in homes since the late 1800s, so I would say most of the homes in this community have it."

Cheryl Jouett
MCCD administrator

area.

The \$2 million will be for use only in the Superfund site area.

"We've set a target of at least 100 units to be addressed through that (money)," Jouett said.

MCCD will hire companies to perform risk assessment for eligible houses within the area. Those with high lead levels will be remediated.

The cost is about \$8,500 per home for the actual improvements, plus the cost of assessing and certification after the work is finished.

She said lead-based paint is a major problem in older homes, and said there is probably "quite a bit" in the houses in the Superfund area.

"I would say it's probably very, very common in this community," she said. "That is because most of the buildings were built prior to 1978 when lead paint was banned. Lead paint was used in homes since the late 1800s, so I would say most of the homes in this community have it."

The major concern about lead

paint is its effect on the neurological development of small children who eat the paint.

"Once they get past the age of 6 or 7, the effect is diminished," she said.

Lead-Safe 2000 also announced a schedule for applying for lead-based paint removal.

That includes both the \$2 million Superfund program and the \$3.2 million county-wide program.

Applications from Granite City, Madison or Venice can be made from 2 to 5 p.m. May 15 in the Granite City Library's conference room; from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 17 in the Madison City Hall's council chambers; from 2:30 to 5 p.m. May 17 at the Venice Senior Citizens Center; from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. May 18 at the Venice Senior Citizens Center; from 1 to 4 p.m. May 18 in the Madison City Hall's council chambers; and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 20 in Granite City Library's conference room.

Applicants should bring proof of income, ownership documentation or rental agreements.

For more information, call 692-7040, extension 4383 or 6502.

EPA off clean-up

Continued from Page 1A

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Times Democrat/Sue Nagy

PROGRESS: Haman spoke at a gathering commemorating the cleanup at the Granite City site.

Residents pleased by results at Superfund cleanup site

By Cheryl Caduo
Herald-Examiner/Democrat

GRANITE CITY — Paul Wilson has watched from his front yard as federal environmental regulators turned a monstrous 250,000-ton slag pile into a serene mound of grass at 15th and State streets.

The toxic pile that once sat as a symbol of environmental decay now stands as a symbol of environmental rehabilitation for Wilson, who lives at 1707 Edison Ave.

Wilson joined local politicians and representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at the foot of the slag pile Wednesday to celebrate the nearly completed cleanup of the NL Industries-Taracorp Superfund site.

The cleanup took nearly a decade, cost \$63 million and has included the removal of lead-contaminated soil from 1,500 residential yards in Granite City, Venice and Madison along with the cap-

ping of the slag pile.

Wilson, whose yard was one of the first cleaned up, said he is particularly pleased by the sounds of children playing in neighborhood yards.

"Before it was so dangerous, you didn't want kids playing out in the yard," he said. "Now my grandchildren can come out in the yard and not even think about the lead situation."

Tim Fields, an EPA administrator based in Washington, D.C., deemed the Granite City project a success because the cleanup was done in a timely manner and demonstrates the progress of the Superfund program as it enters its 20th year in operation.

"This site and the program here represents the type of program we want to achieve all across the country," he said.

Madison County Chairman Rudy Papa and Madison Mayor John Haman commended the various agencies that assisted the EPA in getting the cleanup completed.

Those companies that contributed

to the smelter stack emissions that contaminated the area have agreed to pay for \$33 million worth of the cleanup in a settlement with the federal environmental agency.

For the first time in a Superfund cleanup, the settlement will include a supplemental project to dedicate \$2 million to address lead-paint contamination for homes at the site.

Cheryl Joett, director of Madison County Community Development, which is administering the lead-based paint program, urged residents to apply for the program, which will have enough funds to clean about 100 homes.

Applications can be filled out at the Granite City Library from 2 to 5 p.m. May 16 and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 20.

Other sessions will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 17 and from 1 to 4 p.m. May 18 at Madison City Hall, and from 2:30 to 5 p.m. May 17 and from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. May 18 at the Venice Senior Citizens Center.

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■ Fifty families are working with the county to remove lead paint in their homes. About 100 more will be helped with the EPA grant.

Grant

Funds will be used for lead hazard cleanup

Continued from page 1

money to the EPA for the reduction of lead-paint hazards, said Cheryl Jouett, the county's community development administrator.

The money will go to helping people re-paint their older homes and replace windows with flaking lead paint, she said.

The county received a similar grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in October that funded the remediation of lead paint in 200 units of privately owned, low-income housing.

The Lead-Based Paint Hazard Control Program has been successful since it first began two years ago. But many more homes need work, Jouett said.

"We have just begun to get our feet wet," she said. "But we will continue to look for more grants to expand the program."

The program is the only one of its kind working to reduce lead hazards in Madison County.

Priority is given to homes with a child identified as having an elevated blood-lead level.

Other priority homes include those where a lead hazard exists and where children under the age of 6 or a pregnant woman reside. Work in these homes includes the removal of lead paint, replacement of windows and doors, or the cleaning of attics and walls.

The Lead-Based Paint Hazard Control Program is coordinated by the county's Community Development office and the Madison County Health Department. More than 4,000 children in the county will be

screened for lead poisoning during the next three years.

If not detected early, children with elevated blood-lead levels can suffer from damage to the brain and nervous system, behavior and learning problems, slowed growth, hearing problems and headaches. The symptoms of high lead levels are similar to flu symptoms. But they don't always appear in the early stages.

"Children can look perfectly normal without any identifying factors," said Deborah Tscheschlok, a county health department manager. "That's why we encourage all parents to get their children tested."

Only 5.6 percent of the children in Madison County were screened for blood lead levels in 1998, she said. In a county with many older homes, more children should be tested.

"We have a lot of education to do to make sure parents understand lead poisoning," she said.

The health department offers screenings in its immunization clinic. For more information, call 692-8954.

In 1978, the Consumer Product Safety Commission banned inter-

ior-grade lead paint for use in homes. Industrial paints and coatings may still contain high levels of lead.

Children who eat a well-balanced diet may avoid lead buildup in their blood. Foods high in calcium, vitamin C and iron can prevent blood-lead poisoning.

An estimated 1.7 million children in the United States have high blood-lead levels, according to the Centers for Disease Control. These numbers remain high despite the removal of lead from gasoline, food canning products and the banning of lead-based paint for homes. Deteriorating lead-based paint in older housing is responsible for most of the remaining cases.

The Illinois Department of Public Health has designated some high-risk areas in the county. Factors contributing to the risk are level of income, age of structure and location of cases of elevated blood-lead levels. More than 90 percent of the homes in the high-risk areas were built before 1979.

The high-risk ZIP codes are Alton (62002), East Alton (62024), Granite City (62040), Hartford (62048), Madison (62087), New Douglas (62074), Venice (62090), Wood River (62095), South Roxana (62087) and Cottage Hills (62018).